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ADOPTION OF THE REPORT OF THE COMMISSION ON ITS TWENTY-SEVENTH SESSION

Draft report

Addendum

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Chapter II

ACTION BY THE UNITED NATIONS TO IMPLEMENT THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE WORLD POPULATION CONFERENCE, 1974

1. The Population Commission considered item 3 of its agenda at its 452nd and 453rd meetings, on 28 March 1994. It had before it the concise report of the Secretary-General on the monitoring of world population trends and policies, with special emphasis on refugees (E/CN.9/1994/2).

A. General debate on national experience in population matters

2. In the general debate on national experience in population matters, several delegations reported on the demographic situation in their respective countries and provided information on recent demographic trends, population policies and programmes, the integration of population and development, and international cooperation and assistance. The general debate provided an opportunity to highlight the population issues that required special international attention.

3. Several delegations reported that their countries were carrying out activities in the field of population, including population research, the provision of technical support for population activities and the funding of

population programmes through bilateral or multilateral cooperation. A number of delegations noted their active involvement in the preparations for the International Conference on Population and Development. The need to promote population research and the exchange of data was emphasized. Some delegations also stressed the need to enhance public awareness about population issues through special educational activities. It was acknowledged that the effective formulation of population policy required accurate information and a number of delegations commended the work of the Population Division in producing comparable estimates of population indicators, evaluating their quality and making them available to a wide public.

4. Most delegations reaffirmed their support for the provision of family planning services that would ensure reproductive choice. They emphasized the need to expand access to a wide range of contraceptive methods, to provide information and make greater use of education campaigns, and to ensure that family planning services also encompassed reproductive health. Some delegations stressed that abortion should not be used as a method of family planning. The importance of reducing the number of pregnancies of teenage women was also underscored.

5. One representative noted that the reduction of population growth in her country was seen as an important factor that would accelerate socio-economic development and improve people's standard of living. She reviewed the progress made in the implementation of her country's family planning programme and its contribution to the stabilization of the world population. Economic development, the improvement of women's status and the promotion of social welfare services were major factors that led to reduction of the birth rate.

6. Improvements in the status of women were considered essential by most delegations. The need to provide women with equal access to education and employment was stressed. It was noted that as women acquired greater control over their own lives, they were more likely to choose responsibly the number and spacing of their children. It was suggested that society should strive to increase the solidarity between the sexes so that men and women would share equally their parental responsibilities.

7. Given the continued decline in fertility in many world regions, the medium- and long-term consequences of population ageing were singled out as a matter of concern for a growing number of countries. In some countries, population ageing was already straining social security systems. To improve the situation of the aged, it was judged necessary to strengthen the solidarity between generations, both at the level of society at large and within the family.

8. Several delegations stressed that greater efforts were needed in order to combat preventable diseases, reduce morbidity and prevent premature mortality. The growing impact of the acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS) pandemic was a major source of concern and it was acknowledged that more research was necessary to improve the understanding of the epidemiology of the disease.

9. A number of delegations considered that the magnitude and implications of population movements both within and between countries was a source of concern. The impact of migration on population distribution, especially on urbanization,

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was identified as an issue of continued policy relevance, particularly for developing countries. The need to adopt an integrated approach in the formulation of population policies was stressed and it was noted that rural development should be part of a balanced development strategy.

10. The delegations of several central and eastern European countries, including the successor States of the former USSR, described the important demographic changes that had taken place in their countries after the major political developments that had occurred since 1989. As a result of economic stringencies, declining standards of living and growing uncertainty about the future, people in those countries were postponing marriage, child-bearing and even divorce. Fertility had declined sharply in several of the economies in transition and there was growing evidence that mortality was rising, particularly among men and children. Because access to effective contraceptive methods was limited in some of those countries, the number of induced abortions was high and that was a source of concern. Although policies to improve health care and access to family planning methods were being formulated, assistance and international cooperation were needed for such policies to be successful.

11. Another important change that the economies in transition were undergoing was related to both internal and international migration. Several countries that had formerly been primarily countries of origin had become receiving countries of various types of migrants, including asylum-seekers, refugees, returning citizens and migrant workers. Short-term migration between neighbouring countries was increasing. Some delegations noted that although their countries were willing to grant asylum to people in need of protection, they needed the assistance of the international community in order to ensure the continued well-being of the people concerned.

B. Monitoring of population trends and policies, with special emphasis on refugees

12. The Commission expressed general satisfaction with the concise report on the monitoring of world population trends and policies, with special emphasis on refugees (E/CN.9/1992/2) and welcomed, in particular, the inclusion of the special topic on refugees, which was of major relevance for the international community. The full report, entitled World Population Monitoring, 1993, 1/ was available to the delegations as a background document (ESA/P/WP.121). Many delegations expressed their appreciation of the role of the Population Division in compiling and evaluating data and monitoring population levels and trends. The need for timely and accurate information on population levels and trends was underscored.

13. However, several delegations noted that important recent developments regarding the movement of refugees were not reflected in the concise report, although some were mentioned in the full report. Examples were the flows of refugees occurring within the successor States of the former Yugoslavia and refugee flows directed to other central and eastern European countries, including the Russian Federation. In most instances, those flows were said to be caused by ethnic conflict. It was considered important to strengthen the analysis of the causes leading to world-wide refugee flows, especially in view

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of the need for the international community to address the root causes of forced population movements.

14. A number of delegations recognized that it was difficult to ensure that a comprehensive treatment of refugee movements worldwide would be perfectly up to date, especially given the volatility of many situations. Furthermore, it was acknowledged that the main sources of information on refugee flows were reports by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and that not all forced migrants were necessarily recognized as refugees. Some delegations mentioned the efforts made by their Governments to streamline the consideration of asylum applications and ensure that only those persons granted asylum would stay. International cooperation and international agreements were seen as necessary to ensuring an effective control of international migration flows.

15. The need to improve the availability, reliability and comparability of data on international migration flows and on the various types of international migrants was stressed. It was suggested that the United Nations provide assistance to interested countries in improving statistics on international migration, including assistance in formulating definitions of different types of migrants, collecting statistics on legal migration and estimating unauthorized or illegal migration. It was judged important that migration statistics distinguish between the migration of foreigners and that of citizens, since in some countries citizens constituted the majority of the migrant inflows.

16. Regarding international migration policies, one representative noted that the report did not properly reflect the conditions under which a passport allowing emigration from his country could be obtained. Representatives of other central and eastern European countries noted important policy changes that had recently occurred, particularly with respect to the treatment of refugees and asylum-seekers. Representatives of other countries stressed the importance of ensuring that legal migrants were not subject to discrimination, that their integration was fostered and that xenophobia was combated. Family reunification was considered an important right, but it was subject to restrictions in some countries.

17. Some delegations suggested that, in presenting or discussing future population trends, several alternative scenarios should be provided in order to avoid misunderstandings about the meaning of projections. Given the recency of certain changes in population trends, it was suggested that the medium variant of the projections might not represent the most likely path for certain regions. For instance, the sharp fertility declines registered recently in several central and eastern European countries, including the Russian Federation, would only be taken into account in the next revision of the projections. Similarly, there were a number of countries that had experienced mortality increases in recent years, a development that was not yet reflected in the concise report. Representatives suggested that more attention had to be given to the particular situation of central and eastern European countries, where worsening economic conditions, a deterioration of the health infrastructure, poor quality of medical services and growing occupational hazards had led to rising mortality rates. In developing countries, the growing AIDS pandemic was one of the factors that contributed to increasing mortality levels. The need to undertake

an in-depth study of adult mortality in both developed and developing countries was noted, as well as the need to understand better the mechanisms leading to mortality decline even under deteriorating economic conditions.

18. Several representatives called for a more comprehensive treatment of the demographic situation of the economies in transition, especially in view of their need to formulate policies to cope with the changes taking place. A major concern was the widespread use of induced abortion prompted by the lack of access to effective contraceptive methods. Although policies to increase the availability of contraceptives were being formulated, international assistance was needed to ensure adequate reproductive choice.

19. Several delegations noted that declining fertility trends were noticeable in all major developing regions and that the information on contraceptive use presented in the report was very useful in assessing the unmet need that still existed in many countries of the world. Such data could and were used by donor Governments to target their population assistance. The results of the Seventh Population Inquiry among Governments were also useful in that regard.

C. Review and appraisal of progress made towards the
implementation of the World Population Plan of Action

20. At the 453rd meeting, on 28 March 1994, the Commission was informed that the report of the Secretary-General on the fourth review and appraisal of the World Population Plan of Action (A/CONF.171/PC/3) was before it for information, but that discussion and action on that document would take place at the third session of the Preparatory Committee for the International Conference on Population and Development.

Notes

- 1/ United Nations publication, forthcoming.
